



The Commission on
Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity

CWCSEO

Connecticut General Assembly

**Testimony of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity
Presented to the Appropriations Committee
February 28, 2023**

In Support of: H.B. No. 6659

*** H.B. No. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR. (Health
Agencies).**

Good morning, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Exum, Representative Paris, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and other distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee; my name is Hannah Scott, and I am a Fellow for the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO) from the Yale School of Public Health. I am submitting joint testimony written by myself, Thomas Nuccio, Children's Policy Analyst of the CWCSEO and Dr. Pina Violano, CWCSEO's Designee on the Commission on Community Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention.

The Commission wishes to **express support with guidance** for the following bill before you: **H.B. No. 6659** which provides much needed funding for addressing community gun violence in the State of Connecticut.

Gun violence is a public health crisis in the United States. **US residents are ten times as likely to die from firearms than any other high-income country and young people are by far the most impacted.**¹ Between 2010-2019 72,712 people aged zero to twenty-three died of violent firearm-related injuries.²

Currently, gun violence prevention measures include gun buyback and enforcement programs, illicit drug use and enforcement programs, and gang prevention and enforcement programs.³ **Yet**

¹ Sanchez, C., Jaguan, D., Shaikh, S., McKenney, M., & Elkbuli, A. (2020). A systematic review of the causes and prevention strategies in reducing gun violence in the United States. *The American Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 38(10), 2169–2178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajem.2020.06.062>

² Bottiani, J. H., Camacho, D. A., Lindstrom Johnson, S., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2021). Annual research review: Youth firearm violence disparities in the United States and implications for prevention. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 62(5), 563–579. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13392>

³ Wang, E. A., Riley, C., Wood, G., Greene, A., Horton, N., Williams, M., Violano, P., Brase, R. M., Brinkley-Rubinstein, L., Papachristos, A. V., & Roy, B. (2020). Building Community Resilience to prevent and mitigate community impact of gun violence: Conceptual framework and intervention design. *BMJ Open*, 10(10). <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-040277>



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none of these programs or efforts work to address the root causes of community gun violence. We must address and fund community gun violence at face value with a comprehensive portfolio of solutions that holistically address the issue of community gun violence.⁴

Economic Stability

Gun violence rates are higher in communities that experience significant economic inequalities. Gun Violence has statewide impact but is hyper-local in nature. Most street-level gun violence exists primarily within cities and is confined to specific neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are typically in lower income areas that have been made vulnerable through historic disinvestment, resulting in fewer resources and economic opportunities. Furthermore, violence is generally perpetrated by a small, high-risk group of individuals. Violence reduction strategies are necessary for reducing quality-of-life and economic stability. Furthermore, gun violence degrades the economic stability of the communities that experience it. In neighborhoods that experience higher rates of community gun violence, on average, home values are reduced by four percent while credit scores and home ownership levels are lower.⁵ Economic inequality is profound in Connecticut, second only to New York, with the top 1% of residents earning 42 times that of the average income of the bottom 99% of residents.⁶

*Solutions:*⁷

- Strengthen **job training programs and availability of jobs** in communities most impacted by gun violence (provide livable wages)
- Include **community participation in economic decision-making** processes

Neighborhood and Physical Environment

⁴ Artiga, S., & Hinton, E. (2018, May). *Beyond health care: The role of social determinants in promoting ...* - KFF. Kaiser Family Foundation. Retrieved from <https://files.kff.org/attachment/issue-brief-beyond-health-care>

⁵ Webster, D. W. (2022). Public health approaches to Reducing Community Gun Violence. *Daedalus*, 151(1), 38–48. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01886

⁶ Sommeiller, R. • B. E. (n.d.). *Income inequality in the U.S. by state, Metropolitan Area, and County*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org/publication/income-inequality-in-the-us/>

⁷ The New Haven Community Violence Prevention Group. (2014, September). *Selected strategies for community gun violence prevention*. Retrieved from <https://d33euwcbjqojuo.cloudfront.net/documents/Report-of-the-New-Haven-Community-Violence-Prevention-Group.docx>



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Firearm homicides and assaults occur more often in urban neighborhoods with high levels of community distress and poverty.² Additionally, gun violence is highly concentrated in pockets of neighborhoods. For instance, 20% of New Haven is deemed high risk for violent crimes, with 75% of all New Haven crimes occurring within this section.⁷ The highest rates of violent crime in New Haven correspond with the most impoverished and racially/ethnically isolated areas of the city.⁷

Solutions:

- **Mortgage assistance for home ownership in formerly redlined areas**²
- Address **displacement due to gentrification**²
- **Blight reduction** (Revitalization of vacant lots and run-down building)²
- **Green Space Implementation** (Open land, community gardens, parks and playgrounds, etc.)³
 - Directly tied to reduced crime and violence as well as improved mental well-being³

Education

Education is a critically important factor that can help develop social and emotional skills that teach young people how to manage feelings, build relationships, and set goals. Youth who are involved in violence report doing so because they do not feel they have opportunity for growth whether it be academic, economic, or social.⁷ Bullying in schools also makes individuals more likely to engage in gun violence.¹

Solutions:

- **School Climate modification** where the quality and character of the school life focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community and focus on the implementation of restorative approaches.
- **Education** addressing firearm safety, access, storage and carrying²
- **Implementation of Social Emotional Learning principles** to teach youth how to interact with their feelings, one another, and resilience⁸

⁸ Rachel's Challenge. (2022). *Preventing youth gun violence in schools*. Preventing Youth Gun Violence in Schools. Retrieved from <https://rachelschallenge.org/get-info/preventing-gun-violence/>



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Community and Social Context

Youth

Youth begin encountering risk factors for engaging in gun violence at age seven.¹ Risk factors for youth in our communities for becoming involved in gun violence begins on average at seven years old.¹ Because risk factors begin so early intervention is necessary prior to adolescence to disrupt the effects of exposure to violence.² While young people experience risk very young, older adolescents disproportionately bear the burden of firearm injury and mortality relative to younger children (94% in 2019).²

Solutions:

- **Create and maintain central locations for engagement** and “hanging out” for youth in similar communities when not in school⁷
- **Provide mental health supports** needed to disrupt community cycles of violence²
- **Street outreach, community norming, and group deterrence**²
- **Provide job and economic opportunities** for youth⁷

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion and community belonging are protective factors against community gun violence.³ Men, who consistently experience less social cohesion, are more likely to be harmed by and participate in gun violence than women.²

Solutions:

- **Train youth and adults how to advocate** for community members and community⁷
- **Increase opportunities to create relationships, which bolster trust** among community members⁷
- **Meet with the community to hear their voices** and include them in the process of making change⁷
- **Design and implement partnerships** with community leaders³
- **Create peer networks of boys, young men, and adult men** to create a sense of security and community among one another²



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Normalization of Gun Violence

Witnessing constant violence results in desensitization and observational learning of aggression and violence, leading young people to consider violence as normal.¹ **In the average lifetime, individuals have five different exposures to gun violence with 95% hearing at least one gunshot and 21% hearing a gunshot at least weekly.⁹**

Race and Ethnicity

Gun violence disproportionately harms Black and brown communities, and primarily Black and brown men. ⁷ **Firearm homicide rates amongst Black people are approximately two to four times that of their Latinx and Indigenous counterparts and ten to fourteen times that of their white and Asian American people.² Seventy-five percent of Black children in urban communities reported hearing gunshots by the age of seven.²** The racial disparities seen in community gun violence has significant impacts of poly-victimization and creates intergenerational trauma across Black, Indigenous, and people of color.²

Health and Well-Being

Exposure and involvement in community gun violence is exceedingly harmful to one's health. Nationwide, \$229 billion is spent annually because of medical treatment, disability, lost productivity, and criminal justice responses to gun violence.⁵

Substance Use

Gun violence is associated with a higher susceptibility of drug and alcohol use. **Community gun violence increases the risk of using crack cocaine by seventeen times, in addition to increasing the likelihood of binge drinking behavior and marijuana use.¹**

Mental Health

Community gun violence has deleterious mental health effects, but it is important to note that there is little evidence that supports the idea that individuals diagnosed with mental illness commit the majority of gun-related crimes.¹ **Gun violence participation and**

⁹ Riley, C., Roy, B., Harari, N., Vashi, A., Violano, P., Greene, A., Lucas, G., Smart, J., Hines, T., Spell, S., Taylor, S., Tinney, B., Williams, M., & Wang, E. A. (2017). Preparing for disaster: A cross-sectional study of social connection and gun violence. *Journal of Urban Health*, 94(5), 619–628. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-016-0121-2>



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exposure, on the other hand, is associated with fear, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and PTSD. ^{1,2,9} While firearm violence induces short term psychological stress, exposure to gun violence contributes to long last impacts of cognitive development and mental and behavioral health. ^{2,9}

The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity urges the prioritization of funding community gun violence prevention in the State of Connecticut. By addressing the root causes of gun violence and providing funding for gun violence reduction strategies, Connecticut can create safer and more equitable communities. With investments in education and training programs, strengthening of the neighborhood and physical environment, and the development of strong and supportive communities, we can significantly reduce the impact of gun violence across the entire state.

We appreciate the strong leadership of the Appropriations Committee on this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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